

DEATHBED ATTENDANTS TO A DYING WORLD

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May God grant me to speak as he
would wish and express thoughts
worthy of his gifts . . .

Wisdom 7.15

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I suggest that each of us pursues our ministry on a death scene and that more and more professionals are becoming witnesses of the death of the culture, in spite of the most frantic efforts in the other direction. And I mean, again, something very concrete by all of that: I mean that educators no longer are capable of educating, and that doctors are no longer healing, and that lawyers, by and large, are no longer seriously interested in injustices; and to come to the churches, that it is more and more rare to hear on any organized traditional front...the word of God, the simple Word of God.*

--Daniel Berrigan

This dissertation speaks of the world wide crisis that moves toward us with alarming surety. It explores the inevitable breakdown of a world that has no control over its insensitive expansion.

The thrust of this paper is toward the recognition of the current symptoms of this world's dying process. It also attempts to face the problem of hope in the midst of a world that confronts us with more suffering than we can possibly alleviate.

The concern of this paper is toward ministry to a dying world. It assumes, openly, that we have passed the point of no return. Energy should now be turned toward preparation, training and competence in serving the needs experienced in world crisis. Precious lives will be broken as this machine, that we see to be world civilization, slowly grinds to a stop. Seeing this, will it be possible to build islands of hope for ourselves and those about us?

To accomplish the task of exploring the practicality of hope in a dying world I introduce the writings of Albert Camus and the person of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Focus is given to Dr. Rieux's struggle in Camus's, The Plague. Attention is also given to the life style of Mother Teresa, a nun who currently works with the dying in the streets of Calcutta. The existential and Christian approaches outlined in the paper are supplemented with quotations by Paul Tillich.

It is important to clarify that the format of this paper is somewhat untraditional. It is written, at significant points, in dialogue form. It often takes on the appearance of a play.

*Daniel Berrigan, "Address to the National Association of College and University Chaplains" (Austin, TX: April 1973).

By his own resourcefulness he has tamed the abyss,
and planted it with islands.
Thanks to him all ends well
and all things hold together by means of his word.

--Ecclesiastes 43.23,25,26,28.

You need not fear the terrors of the night,
the plague that stalks in the dark . . .

I rescue all who cling to me,
I protect whoever knows my name,
I answer everyone who invokes me,
I am with them when they are in trouble . . .

Psalms 91.5a,6a,14,15.

Because you are precious in my eyes,
Because you are honored and I love you . . .
Do not be afraid, for I am with you.

Isaiah 43.4,5

Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?
My God, my God, why have you deserted me?

Matthew 27.46

PROLOGUE

The area of study I have chosen to pursue in my years at the School of Theology has been pastoral counseling/psychotherapy. The problems outlined in the pages that follow will demand a growing familiarity with skills in this field; therefore, much of my work has been in attaining a grounding in those skills. That work continues with intensity.

I have chosen to write this dissertation in the futuristic context of a dramatic, albeit long-term, crisis that moves toward us with alarming surety. Indeed, it is already with us. Only in the future will it be seen for what it is--that inevitable breakdown of a world that has no control over its insensitive expansion. This breakdown already manifests itself daily in mental institutions, executive suites, prisons, legislative chambers, classrooms, skid row liquor stores, convalescent homes, churches, and unemployment lines. These manifestations will increase. It is in this context that I seek to establish a center, a ground from which to create a healing ministry.

I have chosen to face the problem of hope, of courage, of strength in the midst of a world confronting us with more pain than we can possibly alleviate.

I have chosen to explore the Source of a healing attitude that must be recognized as present, if any skills of ministry hope to be given an opportunity for application.

How do we choose to continue when the suffering surrounding us outweighs the progress being made against it? How do we continue when we are daily confronted with the realization that statistically the suffering will increase; that at least by our methods of calculation what is being done will never match the needs of what needs to be done? How do we continue in the midst of an environment speaking continual despair?

As I have stated above, my thesis is based upon the recognition that our world is in a process of decay. Precious lives will be broken as this machine, that we see to be world civilization, slowly grinds to a stop. Seeing this, will it be possible to build islands of hope for ourselves and those about us, or will we be forced to submerge beneath the abyss of despair that will inevitably engulf us?

A warning is necessary for the reader. My personal anthropology is centered upon the belief that humanity is in a state of estrangement from its deepest nature. We are at once of infinite worth and amazing grace and at the same moment divorced, estranged, fallen from this innate sense of our worth. I have a dim view of a world that has built itself upon a foundation that gives all of its allegiance and power to its estrangement and refuses to recognize its innate gift of grace. Such a world must sooner or later totter and experience the fall it has been rehearsing daily for century upon century. The warning is a preparation. The first section of this presentation will appear to offer neither any hope for humanity nor any need for hope, since we are all so fallen! Nothing could be

further from the truth. We are indeed estranged from who and what we are. And yet, possibly, the death scene we are about to enter will provide the opportunity to move beyond this deadlock in which we currently have found ourselves--of bowing down to our estrangement so that it won't come forward and encounter us with all of its power. Perhaps the inevitability of this confrontation will stop us from giving our collective fallenness the alms of fear it demands to keep from raising its ugly head. Perhaps with nothing more to lose, we will meet face to face with this terror of our estrangement, and then move beyond to what we are in actuality. Perhaps we shall one day celebrate the life that was born in the midst of a dying world.

A STORY

Once upon a time there was a child giant that visited the earth bringing with him a massive tinker-toy kit. Soon after his arrival he began building, layer upon layer, story upon story, a structure reaching toward the sky. Upon each layer he put several hundred thousand people, all of whom seemed to stay in their new home due to a blending of fear and convenience. In return for this place of abode he made them pledge to feed him all that he wanted for the remainder of his life.

This child giant continued to build day in and day out. The toy structure, while getting higher, also began to become shaky, because the giant had not sufficiently broadened the foundation. Meanwhile, by now there were several hundred million people living in this toy building.

Finally it became apparent to many, especially those on levels numbered 2000 and above that the building would soon topple. They tried to get the attention of the young giant. He seemed to hear nothing. He merely continued in his unending process of building and eating, building and eating.

Unfortunately, one day, the wildest fears of the people who predicted the demise of the building were realized. The structure did collapse. And great was the fall thereof.

SCENE I

Corporations die. Nations die. Ideologies die. Death survives them all. Death is--apart from God himself--the greatest moral power in this world, outlasting and subdividing all other powers no matter how marvelous they may seem to be for the time being.¹

I am mindful of many . . . symptoms of death in America--like the apartheid stalemate in race, the prevalent waste ethic in production and marketing and consumerism² . . . the fraud and fakery and the perils to human health and safety sponsored by American merchandising methodology³ . . . the degeneration of medical care, the emergent technological totalitarianism, . . . the official assault against due process of law, and the proliferation of illegitimate authority.⁴
--William Stringfellow

¹William Stringfellow, *An Ethic for Christian and Other Aliens in a Strange Land* (Waco, TX: Word, 1973), p. 81.

²*Ibid.*, p. 71.

³*Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 71.

In this world as it is . . . every value, every goal, every policy, every action, every routine, every enterprise of each and every principality has the elemental significance of death.⁵

All virtues which nations elevate and exercise--military prowess, material abundance, technological sophistication, imperial grandeur, high culture, racial conquest, sport, language, or whatever--are ancillary and subservient to the moral presence of death in the nation. And it is the same with the surrogate nations--the other principalities, like the corporations and conglomerates, ideologies and bureaucracies, and authorities and institutions of every name and description.⁶

--William Stringfellow

I suggest that each of us pursues our ministry on a death scene and that more and more professionals are becoming witnesses of the death of the culture, in spite of the most frantic efforts in the other direction. And I mean, again, something very concrete by all of that: I mean that educators no longer are capable of educating, and that doctors are no longer healing, and that lawyers, by and large, are no longer seriously interested in injustices; and to come to the churches, that it is more and more rare to hear on any organized traditional front . . . the Word of God, the simple Word of God.⁷

--Daniel Berrigan

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁷Daniel Berrigan, "Address to the National Association of College and University Chaplains" (Austin, TX: April 1973).

We are beyond the point of no return. It is now simply a matter of time, of letting the worldwide disease run its course. Our chronic condition must finally be recognized as terminal. The task before us is preparation. Our need is to establish identities capable of attending to persons experiencing an environment of death and dying.

The plague from which our dying world suffers is nothing new. It is merely that reality at the heart of the Myth of the Fall of Humanity made manifest on a massive scale. To give explanation to this Fall, I will introduce Paul Tillich, a twentieth century theologian.

The symbol of 'the Fall' is a decisive part of the Christian tradition. Although usually associated with the biblical story of the 'Fall of Adam,' its meaning transcends the myth of Adam's Fall . . . Theology must clearly and unambiguously represent 'the Fall' as a symbol for the human situation universally.

In order to sharpen this understanding, the phrase 'transition from essence to existence' is used in this system.⁹ It means that transition from essence to existence is a universal quality of finite being.¹⁰ The motif of the Fall is the tragic-universal character of existence.¹¹

⁸The fictitious name of the city in Albert Camus, *The Plague* (New York: Random House, 1973), in which over one-half of the population dies of bubonic plague.

⁹Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), II, 29.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, II, 36.

¹¹*Ibid.*, II, 38.

The common point of all existentialist attacks is that man's existential situation is a state of estrangement from his essential nature. The existence of the individual is filled with anxiety and threatened with meaninglessness.¹²

So that we might escape the terror of fully experiencing the existential estrangement that is ours, we spin illusions and project them before us. We will not accept our fallenness. We are master artists, each with skills that have improved through thousands of years as parent and teacher pass the seed of illusion onto the next generation. This learning goes on at a level beneath conscious awareness. It is the central function of what Kenneth Patchen calls: "The scene of the crime: Civilized Living."¹³

We have been hypnotized into the art of creating ever more impressive illusions. William Stringfellow has already provided a list: "Military prowess, material abundance, technological sophistication, imperial grandeur, high culture, racial conquest, sport, language . . ."¹⁴ These illusions promise to protect us from our fallenness. And yet, quite to the contrary, they merely keep the awareness of our estrangement at a subconscious level. When the inevitable rumblings beneath the surface promise to introduce a raw vomiting of undisguised fallenness into our consciousness, we have no response other than fear. This anxiety leads inevitably to a greater

¹²*Ibid.*, II, 25.

¹³Kenneth Patchen, *Hallelujah Anyway* (New York: New Directions, 1960).

¹⁴Stringfellow, p. 68.

sophistication in the art of avoidance we have learned so well. The protective plaster gets thicker and ever thicker.

What we feed, in the name of security, is in actuality the nourishment of our deeper insecurity. Anxiety gains sustenance in the retreat from anxiety.

Alas, ours is a world that holds up its fallenness as a cure. We buy anything that will maintain the illusion and hold off the confrontation: activity, status, possessions, abundance, "progress" . . . all synonyms for a style of life that keeps us busy achieving for the future. Estrangement is here and now. It also patiently awaits us in the future. The arts of activity, status, possession, abundance and progress are the arts of prolonging the showdown. Our every action is an attempt to create a security we cannot create.

Deathbed attendants will, of necessity, need to be those who have increasingly welcomed a confrontation with their individual and collective estrangement and in some way successfully moved into a position of acceptance. It is my personal experience that exactly at this place of confrontation we are invited into the very terror we had anticipated and then beyond. There is life after death. But we must first die to experience it.

Thus we return, full circle, to our dying world. Much of the agony awaiting us in the years ahead will be the suffering brought on by the stripping away of our death-defying illusions. When an outer world, where those who have been breast-fed on status and pampered with the need for progress and possessions, is suddenly forced to

recognize that such luxuries are no longer available, the inner world of many will fall. That is the existential meaning of the Fall. It is something we must all eventually own; something we shall all experience. Putting it off does not make it any less inevitable.

The hope of the Christian message, which we will explore in depth in Scenes II and III of this presentation, is that there will always be loving hands there to catch us--always. The tragedy is that in our panic we reject everything that comes our way. Our fear does not allow trust.

We have before us, then, the task of trading the arts of illusion for the art of a trembling trust. Ours is the need to continually experience our fall and continually experience our being caught, and then to share this experience with those we meet.

The thesis of Scene I is that on a world scale it is too late to hope for an altering of our habits of illusion, and the destruction this illusion brings. The genesis of this destructive illusion beyond our control may be experienced on the level of our universal need for security, experienced as a need for wealth given over to a craving for possessions. As a culture and as a world, we have manufactured intricate systems which exist for the sole purpose of reinforcing and preying upon this craving. This destructive plague may also be experienced on the level of our need for security, experienced as a need for protection given over to an experience of "defensive aggression." Vietnam and Hiroshima are but two recent examples.

The focus of power has been given to those who seek to

perpetuate these illusions. Whether those in power seek to use it for personal gain or whether they merely act reflexively to a disastrous lesson well learned, is no longer an issue. The issue is that the power has been given away. Momentum has taken over. We experience a world out of control.

Avoidance of death brings a more painful death. Avoidance of the inevitable is inevitably destructive. In our attempt to escape death we have created an environment of destruction. Whether it be war upon endless war or capitalism as an excuse for undergirding our self-seeking urges, the result has been a continual neglect of the deepest needs of human being: the need to confront our anxiety in the midst of estrangement, and the need to experience the grace that awaits this necessary confrontation. The cosmic drama seeks fulfillment within each of our lives. Our avoidance brings unnecessary disaster.

Our future promises to be that of disaster. We are about to collect the destructive conclusion of what centuries of avoidance have sown. We are brought to a world deathbed. The first response will be that of panic. And yet, from within a voice speaks:

People of the world, hold off your frantic race to turn back. There is no escaping. Today we must learn what it is to settle-in and accept what comes our way. The infection of past generations brings a sickness from which we cannot hide. It is a part of every breath we take. Until now we have willingly breathed in all that our lungs could hold. We have been enthusiastic accomplices in strengthening the disease given to us at birth. Let us, therefore, not claim innocence. Let us rather, begin that necessary journey toward acceptance. Let us begin a search for

our individual and collective identities as those who have gone against those needs that are at the heart of each of us. Let us rediscover those needs. Possibly then, in our recognition of who we are, what we are to do will come to us. Let us not make the mistake of thinking our frantic efforts to change things will bring a cure. Our every movement only spreads the infection.¹⁵

We are lost. We refuse to recognize it. Subtly our fear increases as we frantically bump into each other in a frenzied effort to escape what we intuit to be the impending crisis. In this context, and at every level where avoidance is the keynote, existence implies estrangement. If we are fortunate, we begin to see every experience as an opportunity that can return us to the Source from which we are estranged. Thus, even dying becomes an opportunity to rediscover our essential identity.

¹⁵Kent Hoffman, *Journal* (Orange, CA: 1972-75), January 1975.

When men can generally acquiesce in, even relish, the destruction of their living contemporaries, when they can regard with indifference or irritation the fate of those who live in slums, rot in prisons, or starve in lands that have meaning only in so far as they are vacation resorts, why should they be expected to take the painful actions needed to prevent the destruction of future generations whose faces they will never live to see? Worse yet, will they not curse those future generations whose claim to life can be honored only by sacrificing present enjoyments; and will they not, if it comes to a choice, condemn them to nonexistence by choosing the present over the future?¹⁶

--Robert L. Heilbroner

Stupidity has a knack of getting its way; as we should see if we were not always so much wrapped up in ourselves.¹⁷

--Albert Camus

ORAN/WITHOUT

Our continuous buying of the tragic-universal character of existence has brought us to the inevitable showdown that our style of living demands. This showdown will mean breakdown.

It has not been my intent to become an expert on the inevitability of this worldwide breakdown. I have relied upon others whose concern it has been to survey our future. I will present here the

¹⁶Robert L. Heilbroner, "The Human Prospect," *New York Review of Books*, XX:21-22 (January 24, 1974), 34.

¹⁷Camus, p. 36.

voices of two of these who have a frightening insight into the years ahead. One speaks from a point of understanding the human condition--the tragic-universal character of existence. He is Albert Camus, speaking to us in *The Plague*. The other is a noted historian who has taken the past several years to explore the human prospect. He is Robert L. Heilbroner. I will allow the two of them to interact on the pages before you.

Imagine the setting to be an old one-room apartment, 30 stories up in New York City. A bare bulb in the middle of the room provides the lighting. Several broken sofas line the walls. One is faded brown. The other a well-worn maroon. An old bathrobe is soaking in the sink. Camus smokes.

Heilbroner: *(Standing by the window, watching a cockroach rush across the ceiling.)*

There is a question in the air, a question so disturbing that I would hesitate to ask it aloud did I not believe it existed unvoiced in the minds of many: "Is there hope for man?"¹⁸

Camus: *(Sitting on the brown sofa, his feet avoiding several cockroaches.)*

It's not a question of painting too black a picture. It's a question of taking precautions.¹⁹

Heilbroner: The brooding doubts that it (the question) arouses have to do with life on earth, now and for the relatively few generations that constitute the limit of our capacity to

¹⁸Heilbroner, p. 21.

¹⁹Camus, p. 47.

imagine the future. For the question asks whether we can imagine the future other than as a continuation of the darkness, cruelty and disorder of the past; worse, whether we do not foresee in the human prospect a deterioration of things, even an impending catastrophe of fearful dimensions.²⁰ *(He pours himself a double scotch.)*

Camus: *(Also feeling the need for a drink.)*

Our townsfolk are not more to blame than others; they forget to be modest, that is all, and think that everything still is possible for them; which presupposes that pestilences are impossible. They go on doing business, arrange for journeys, and form views. How should they give a thought to anything like plague, which rules out any future, cancels journeys, silences the exchange of views? They fancy themselves free, and no one will ever be free so long as there are pestilences.²¹

Heilbroner: *(Nodding his head in agreement.)*

The problem is that the challenge to survival still lies sufficiently far in the future, and the inertial momentum of the present industrial order is still so great, that no substantial voluntary diminution of growth, much less a planned reorganization of society, is today even remotely imaginable.²²

Camus gets up from the sofa, muttering something about a merry-go-round and that he is getting fed-up with being dizzy. He kicks a box that is sitting in the middle of the room. Cockroaches run in all directions.

²⁰Heilbroner, p. 21.

²¹Camus, p. 36.

²²Heilbroner, p. 33.

Heilbroner: The outlook is for convulsive change--change forced upon us by external events rather than by conscious choice, by catastrophe rather than by calculation.²³

Camus returns to his seat. There is a radiance about him even though he appears to be deeply troubled. Heilbroner continues.

From a period of harsh adjustment, I can see no realistic escape. Rationalize as we will, stretch the figures as favorably as honesty will permit, we cannot reconcile the requirements for a lengthy continuation of the present rate of industrialization of the globe with the capacity of existing resources of the fragile biosphere to permit or to tolerate the effects of that industrialization. Nor is it easy to foresee a willing acquiescence of humankind, individually or through its existing social organizations, in alterations of life in ways that foresight would dictate.²⁴

Camus: These figures, anyhow, speak for themselves. Yet they are still not sensational enough to prevent our townsfolk, perturbed though they are, from persisting in the idea that what is happening is a sort of accident, disagreeable enough, but certainly of a temporary order.²⁵

Heilbroner: *(Concluding.)*

If then, by the question: "Is there hope for man?" we ask whether it is possible to meet the challenges of the future without the payment of a fearful price, the answer must be:

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Camus, p. 103.

There is no such hope.²⁶

The outlook for man, I believe, is painful, difficult, perhaps desperate . . .²⁷

Camus: (*Jumping to his feet and crushing the box.*)

Ah, if only it had been an earthquake! A good bad shock, and there you are! You count the dead and living, and that's the end of it. But this here damned disease. . . .²⁸

Heilbroner: (*Standing in the doorway, about to leave.*)

The death sentence . . . will permit the continuance of human society, but only on a basis very different from that of the present, and probably only after much suffering during the period of transition.²⁹

(*Exit.*)

Camus stands alone beside the window. He puts a match to a half-smoked cigarette as he gazes into the city lights. The bare bulb remains on. Darkness abounds.

²⁶Heilbroner, p. 33.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁸Camus, p. 108.

²⁹Heilbroner, p. 22.

Frustration: A world of fragile, intricate, complex, love-hungry, affirmation starved, precious persons . . . frenzied, yet painfully stagnant. Directionless suffering. Cosmic claustrophobia. Despair.

Anger: Oh God, our God, what is to be done? So much . . . so many . . . alone, forgotten, broken. I am getting sick and tired of watching a world in growing crisis choose to pay no significant attention to its cancerous wound. We walk around with our lives bandaged and bleeding pretending not to notice.³⁰

--Kent Hoffman

ORAN/WITHIN

The problem: A dying world.

The problem: Individuals confronted with inevitable suffering.

It is the abounding darkness that holds my interest. First, on the world level, as we see the impending crisis actualizing itself in our midst. Secondly, on the individual level, as we recognize that this is where crisis centers. It is people who suffer. There is no such thing as collective suffering. There is only suffering in ever-increasing numbers. My concern always rests with the individual. What is darkness and how does it feel on the individual level where it finally comes to rest? What terror is being lived out from within?

The importance of the death scene upon which we currently find ourselves is not the uniqueness of the agony that promises to unfold,

³⁰Hoffman, Nov. 29, 1973.

but rather the inescapability of the crisis. Currently it is possible to look the other direction. Avoidance will not be so simple in the years to come. I seek to discover forms of ministry that will bring hope to individuals surrounded by unavoidable devastation. I seek to aid in the creation of oases of grace in a desert of suffering and despair. I seek nothing for the future that I do not already seek for the present. The only difference will be the overwhelming contagion of despair that will threaten to undermine all who attempt to share hope.

It becomes important here to explore suffering on an individual level. Thus far, we have walked together through a world that holds up its fallenness in the name of progress. The disease resulting from this progress promises to bring death to the world as we know it and many who exist within it. The disease has always been with us. Only now does it choose to identify itself as terminal on a worldwide level. All will be asked to confront the manifestations of this illness within them.

The second and third scenes of this written presentation will attempt to present models for graced living and healing in the midst of this personal-world confrontation. However, at this point, it becomes necessary to walk into the terror that makes itself at home within an experience of individual suffering. I find it essential that we focus on the form suffering can take within a "fragile, intricate, complex, love-hungry, affirmation-starved, precious person." We will all be represented in this exploration.

I want to introduce Lara Jefferson. Her experience is typically labeled "mental illness." Whatever we choose to call it, the true life description that follows carries with intensity an extreme living out of the fallen/estrangement of which we are all a part. Her pain found its origin in the same universal womb that gave us birth. We cannot claim a difference. We are forced to claim a kinship. Let Lara speak:

But this is getting me nowhere. If I must learn to think differently--there is nothing to do but go about doing it with what few remaining shreds of intelligence I have. But how--is the question . . .

Whether I had more insight than others, or whether it is a fact that the thing feared by us is the thing which befalls us, I do not know. However it got here, the fact is glaringly present that it did overtake me in the twenty-ninth year of my living. It caught me and swept me--where, I do not know. All the way through hell--and very far into heaven. Now it has whirled and left a stranger unknown to me. Sitting here in my body I am weak, sick, and vomit much, and stagger so I can hardly walk. At the least movement, perspiration breaks out all over me--I am a fool--and I know it. The State has adjudged me insane and I am no longer responsible for anything, so it is stupid and senseless for me to try and salvage anything out of the tangle. But since the tangle is I, I cannot let it lay as it is. Even though that would be better--still, I cannot do it. I still have a life on my hands--even though it must be lived out in an insane asylum. Though I have lost every encounter, I am still not dismissed from the conflict. If all my weapons have failed, I must find some others.

I cannot escape from the Madness by the door I came in, that is certain--nor do I want to. They are dead--past--the struggles of yesterday. Let them lay in the past where they have fallen--forgotten. I cannot go back--I shall have to go onward--even though the path leads to 'Three Building'--where the hopeless incurables walk and wail and wait for the death of their bodies.

I cannot escape it--I cannot face it--how can I
endure it?

The whole thing is a dream and a nightmare.³¹

As I meet Lara I am forced to respond:

Your words spell out a vision of existence
(inner darkness belching forth)
that destroys
(vomiting the solid universal shadow of a terror
that can be touched)
me.

I taste the
(screaming and moaning)
greydark bile, the death, the lonely dread
of once again feeling abandoned.
Cold sweat.
Midnight sleeplessness that throws off the soaking
sheets.
A fear of another day
(forehead breaking out)
As I wishfully run backward at top speed
toward the innocence of never having
(unmidwifed)
been born.³²

We must let Lara continue:

Oh, it is all a dream--a delusion--a nightmare.
Nothing is real. Everything is a wild toss of
hallucinations of one kind or another about one
thing or another. All this other raving and howling
going on around me--will not someone come and awaken
me--so that I may go free? If I am to be awakened--
I must awaken myself--for no one else can do it.
But I do not know how. There is only a shadow
remaining of the person I used to be . . .

I have learned through the grim lesson taught by my
failure that my previous methods of trying to adjust
to the problem of living were not the right ones.
If my wrong way of thinking was the net my mind
spun to entrap me, then it is certainly logic, that

³¹Lara Jefferson, "I Have Kept a Lone Death with Madness when
Reason was Dying," in *Exploring Madness* (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole,
1973), pp. 14, 15.

³²Hoffman, Poem Response to Lara, March 1974.

the same sort of spinning cannot release me now that I am entangled. I do not know what is the trouble--only that something is wrong--terribly wrong. And I do not know how to right it.

There is nothing solid to stand on--nothing beneath me but a vast treacherous quagmire of despondency--followed by periods of exultation and ecstasy; and neither condition has any foundation.³³

I do not want to believe such suffering exists. I do not understand such pain; and yet, I have always been, at some level, in touch with its potentiality within my life. I choose to make the following autobiographical statement because I find it a part of our exploration of the individual confronted by the suffering within estrangement.

You see, at times, something happens and this life becomes very real to me. And I get scared, real scared. And I wish I had never been born. And I don't like how I feel. And I wish it would all go away. And it returns. And I am still scared, because there is something very dangerous about being alive. It's like I'm afraid that existence is some kind of sniper. People fall all around me. And I got grazed once, right here on my forehead. I'm afraid. Much of the time I'm really afraid.³⁴

I can remember most of my life being dimly aware of the death Lara talks about. (It seems that much of my childhood was spent hearing about all of the things that could go wrong--physically and emotionally--in a person. My young medical school father had something to do with this. My psychology-sensitive mother had much to do as well.)

When I saw someone else suffering, my reaction was one of

³³*Ibid.*, p. 16.

³⁴Hoffman, March 1974.

self-protective analysis. I would do everything in my power to figure out how that person was different from me, and how such a terrible thing couldn't happen to me after all.

I had "nothing to stand on." For intuitive me there too was "nothing beneath . . . but a vast treacherous quagmire . . ." I was perpetually involved in the decaying fear of total annihilation. I was grounded only in a mind that worked overtime to assure me that I was not like the dying others.

These arguments with existence afforded but a few moments of "security" each day, and such security was only accomplished at times of covering over the fact that Lara Jefferson was inescapably a part of me.

I will, once again, include Tillich, because what he has to say is pertinent.

There is no security and certainty within finitude.³⁵ Finitude in awareness is anxiety. No finite being can conquer its finitude. Anxiety is always present, although it is latent.³⁶ Finitude means having no definite place; it means having to lose every place finally and, with it, to lose being itself. To have no definite and no final space means ultimate insecurity. (Psychotherapy cannot remove ontological anxiety, because it cannot change the structure of finitude). To be finite is to be insecure. This is experienced in man's anxiety about tomorrow; it is expressed in anxious attempts to provide a secure space for himself, physically and socially. Every life-process has this character. The desire for security becomes dominant in special social and psychological situations. Men create systems of security in order to protect their space. But they can only repress their anxiety.³⁷

³⁵Tillich, II, 73.

³⁶*Ibid.*, I, 191.

³⁷*Ibid.*, I, 195.

Our finitude, our estrangement, our suffering unite us. At the center of my understanding of ministry is the recognition that the Lara Jeffersons of this world are "inescapably a part of me." I have no ministry if I cannot see that it is a part of me that suffers before my eyes. I recognize, with intensity, that I have infinite worth; that I am precious. I recognize, with growing intensity, that each person is of equal worth; equal preciousness.

My response to the suffering about me is a primal response to suffering within me. When I am deep in darkness I experience the absolute need for light. The "I" that experiences this need is the me that is precious. The Lara Jefferson who experiences darkness is ultimately a part of the same "me" that I am. We are children of the same God.

I am choosing to close this section with a death scene. It unites the Oran/Without to the Oran/Within. It is from the heart of Albert Camus. This is Camus's most devastating description of death by the plague. It is a description of suffering unto despair. It is a description of one of the suffering children of God. It is, in part, our suffering; our death. It will be repeated again and again.

The child had come out of his extreme prostration and was tossing about convulsively on the bed. From four in the morning Dr. Castel and Tarrou had been keeping watch and noting, stage by stage, the progress and remissions of the malady. Tarrou's bulky form was slightly drooping at the head of the bed, while at its foot, with Dr. Rieux standing beside him, Castel was seated, reading, with every appearance of calm, an old leather-bound book. One by one, as the light increased in the former classroom, the others arrived. Fr. Paneloux, the first to come, leaned against the wall on the opposite side of the bed to Tarrou. His

face was drawn with grief, and the accumulated weariness of many weeks, during which he had never spared himself, had deeply seamed his somewhat prominent forehead. . . . Without speaking, Rieux pointed to the child. His eyes shut, his teeth clenched, his features frozen in an agonized grimace, he was rolling his head from side to side on the bolster.

The doctor's hands were gripping the rail of the bed, his eyes fixed on the small tortured body. Suddenly it stiffened, and seemed to give a little at the waist, as slowly the arms and legs spread out X-wise, From the body, naked under an army blanket, rose a smell of damp wool and stale sweat. The boy had gritted his teeth again. Then very gradually he relaxed, bringing his arms and legs back toward the center of the bed, still without speaking or opening his eyes, and his breathing seemed to quicken. Rieux looked at Tarrou, who hastily lowered his eyes.

They had already seen children die--for many months now death had shown no favoritism--but they had never yet watched a child's agony minute by minute, as they had now been doing since daybreak. Needless to say, the pain inflicted on these innocent victims had always seemed to them to be what in fact it was: an abominable thing. But hitherto they had felt its abomination in, so to speak, an abstract way; they had never had to witness over so long a period the death-throes of an innocent child.

And just then the boy had a sudden spasm, as if something had bitten him in the stomach, and uttered a long, shrill wail. For moments that seemed endless he stayed in a queer, contorted position, his body racked by convulsive tremors; it was as if his frail frame were bending before the fierce breath of the plague, breaking under the reiterated gusts of fever. Then the storm-wind passed, there came a lull, and he relaxed a little; the fever seemed to recede, leaving him gasping for breath on a dank, pestilential shore, lost in a languor that already looked like death. When for the third time the fiery wave broke on him, lifting him a little, the child curled himself up and shrank away to the edge of the bed, as if in terror of the flames advancing on him, licking his limbs. A moment later, after tossing his head wildly to and fro, he flung off the blanket. From between the inflamed eyelids big tears welled up and trickled

down the sunken, leaden-hued cheeks. When the spasm had passed, utterly exhausted, tensing his thin legs and arms, on which, within forty-eight hours, the flesh had wasted to bone, the child lay flat, racked on the tumbled bed, in a grotesque parody of crucifixion.³⁸

"Each of us has the plague within him; no one, no one on earth is free from it."³⁹

³⁸Camus, pp. 197-99.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 235.

SCENE II

You are amazing grace, you are a
precious jewel, you special
miraculous unrepeatable fragile
fearful tender lost sparkling
ruby emerald jewel rainbow
splendor person.⁴⁰

--Joan Baez

⁴⁰Joan Baez (Conception, MO: Conception Abbey Press).

This is a world of special miraculous
 unrepeatable fragile fearful
 tender lost ruby emerald jewel
 rainbow splendor people not getting
 the loving attention they so
 vitally need.⁴¹

THE PROBLEM (REVISITED)

I have, to this point, been talking about the state of estrangement that possesses each of us. I have been talking about the death, destruction, suffering and disregard for human worth that it, century upon century, leaves in its wake. I have been talking about a fallen world and the brokenness that precious (falling) persons feel as they continually, individually, smash into existence. I have been talking about a future that gives me no hope for stopping this suffering. And now I am about to talk about establishing an identity in the midst of an increase in our destruction . . . an identity that I choose to recognize as essentially Christian: Healing (Love incarnate).

Be an oasis of healing. This is my only message. This is my only concern. Healing is love made practical. This is my only message. This is my only concern. Love is Christ made visible. This is my only message. This is my only concern.

What I am about to attempt is the description of three approaches to healing in the midst of an environment of death. The first as a theme for Scene II will be a model for a personal experience

⁴¹Hoffman, November 1973.

of healing. This will be a continuation of the concern I have expressed thus far for the precious and complex needs of the individual. I find it absolutely essential that those seeking to accomplish a healing ministry, train themselves to become competent in meeting the intricate needs of the individual.

The second and third approaches are the theme for Scene III. They will be speaking of establishing an identity capable of withstanding the tension and stress of an unending death scene. In the final scene I propose to explore both the existential approach of Albert Camus and the Christian approach of Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

A loveless world is a dead world,
and always there comes an hour
when all one craves for is a loved
face, the warmth and wonder of a
loving heart.⁴²

--Albert Camus

AMAZING GRACE

I believe in grace.

I believe that there is a light that shines in the darkness, a light
the darkness has never put out.

I believe in the unconditional love of God.

I believe it is offered to all, without exception.

I believe that growth toward the life, person and mystery of that being
we know as Jesus the Christ will bring us to the center and ground of
who we are and what it is we are to be about.

I believe that Jesus the Christ recognized and acted in behalf of the
estrangement/Fall and the amazing grace/infinite worth within each
person.

I believe that he calls us to do the same.

I believe that he saw before himself and us the task of co-experiencing
the suffering and lifting up the infinite worth within each of us.

I believe that shared suffering and the authentic recognition of
another's infinite worth is an act of love.

I believe that love is the first and the last need of each human being.

I believe that ministry is a seeking of competency in offering love to

⁴²Camus, p. 243.

those with whom we come in contact.

I will now attempt to substantiate these beliefs. Allow me to introduce a psychotherapist by the name of Frank Kimper, a former mental patient known to us as Joan, and to reintroduce our resident theologian, Paul Tillich. Frank Kimper is a clinical psychologist who emphasizes the pastoral nature of psychotherapy. Paul Tillich is one of the leading theologians of the twentieth century. Joan is a nineteen year old woman who previously had been considered a "hopeless" schizophrenic. She has been treated in four private hospitals and has had thirty-four electric shock treatments.

The following will be a somewhat free-form discussion between the people I have just introduced. None of them have ever actually met. I will often allow their statements to flow into one another without an interruption. I believe that to superimpose my comments upon the rather creative dialogue that seems to take place as these three people come together becomes burdensome for you.

I rather enjoy the thought that this form of juxtaposing ideas⁴³ creates the background for a process of creative involvement on your part. It provides concepts without imposed transitional "meaning." It trusts that you seek to become a participant. It is an attempt to escape being redundant.

⁴³It seems the important issue for me is to reveal my understanding of the material presented. My understanding of a Rel.D. dissertation is that it is to be a creative juxtaposition of important issues and ideas in the life of the student, needing to be synthesized into a statement that carries meaning and clarity for that student. I believe this is being accomplished in the very putting together of the issues and ideas that are about to be presented. Whenever I sense it important to verbally involve myself in the process for a point of clarity, understanding and/or meaning I will do so.

AMAZING GRACE/UNFOLDING

Frank: Before we begin, let us note that the pronouns "he," "his," "him," hereafter should be interpreted he/she, his/hers, and him/her or she/he, hers/his, her/him.

Love is the one ingredient essential for satisfying human relations; and it is the one ingredient missing in persistently -disturbed and unsatisfying human relations.⁴⁴

Joan: I never have had anyone that I could love and show them that I loved them as much as I wanted. Mother always pushed me away and told me to stop pawing her. It left me all bottled up. You were strong enough to stand my love. I could hug you as hard as I wanted, and you weren't upset. I could feel free to burst out and say, "I love you."⁴⁵

Frank: Every human being "knows" instinctively that his own being is precious, and reacts reflexively (1) with inner joy when he perceives himself to be recognized and affirmed as precious by others. . . .⁴⁶

Joan: At the start, I didn't listen to what you said most of the time, but I watched like a hawk for your expression and the

⁴⁴Frank Kimper, "Some of My Basic Assumptions in Pastoral Counseling" (Unpublished Paper, May 18, 1973).

⁴⁵Malcolm L. Hayward and J. Edward Taylor, "A Schizophrenic Patient Describes the Action of Intensive Psychotherapy," in *Exploring Madness* (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1973), p. 33.

⁴⁶Kimper.

sound of your voice.

After the interview, I would add all this up to see if it seemed to show love.⁴⁷ Meeting you made me feel like a traveler who's been lost in a land where no one speaks his language. Worst of all, the traveler doesn't even know where he should be going. He feels completely lost and helpless and alone. Then, suddenly, he meets a stranger who can speak English. Even if the stranger doesn't know the way to go, it feels so much better to be able to share the problem with someone, to have him understand how badly you feel. If you're not alone, you don't feel hopeless any more. Somehow it gives you life and a willingness to fight again.

Being crazy is like one of those nightmares where you try to call for help and no sound comes out. Or if you call, no one hears or understands. You can't wake up from the nightmare unless someone does hear you and helps you to wake up.⁴⁸

Frank: . . . or (2) with inner hurt/fear/anger when he perceives that he is NOT so recognized by others.⁴⁹

Joan: If you forced your words on me, I usually went catatonic because of the horrible ideas . . . You would leave me feeling like a leper looking at his sores. I felt hopeless over what to do about the problems. I could only go catatonic

⁴⁷Hayward and Taylor, pp. 25, 26.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴⁹Kimper.

to get away. You should have let me know that there was plenty of time to understand and change myself.⁵⁰

Frank: Because every human being senses innately that HIS OWN BEING is precious, his need to have others also perceive (and simultaneously affirm) his being as precious is innate--and absolute.⁵¹

Joan: We schizophrenics say and do a lot of stuff that is unimportant, and then we mix important things in with all this to see if the doctor cares enough to see them and feel them. Until you controlled me and took care of me in your own way, I kept losing sight of you and thinking you were my old mother. When you actually took care of me, I could feel the difference. I could realize that you would be a better mother, and then I wanted to live.⁵²

Frank: All forms of behavior are self-chosen ways of affirming ONE'S OWN BEING as precious. Neurotic forms of behavior are self-chosen ways of attempting to manipulate *others* into affirming one's own being as precious.⁵³

Joan: Patients kick and scream and fight when they aren't sure the doctor can see them. It's a most terrifying feeling to realize that the doctor can't see the real you, that he can't understand what you feel and that he's just going ahead with his own ideas. I would start to feel that I was invisible or

⁵⁰ Hayward and Taylor, p. 26.

⁵¹ Kimper.

⁵² Hayward and Taylor, p. 26.

⁵³ *Ibid.*; Kimper.

maybe not there at all. I had to make an uproar to see if the doctor would respond to me, not just his own ideas.⁵⁴

Frank: Loving means *seeing* a human being AS PRECIOUS simply because, and only because, he IS a human being. Here "precious" means "invaluable," "of immeasurable value." And what is perceived to be precious is the "PERSON," no matter what kind of a body he has, no matter what degree of intelligence or how few talents he has, and no matter how poorly he performs.⁵⁵

Joan: Everyone should be able to look back in their memory and be sure he had a mother who loved him, all of him, even his piss and shit. He should be sure his mother loved him just for being himself; not for what he could do. Otherwise he feels he has no right to exist. He feels he should never have been born.

No matter what happens to this person in life, no matter how much he gets hurt, he can always look back to this and feel that he is lovable. He can love himself and he cannot be broken. You can only be broken if you're already in pieces. By loving me as a baby, you made me whole.⁵⁶ I could only be good if you saw it in me. It was only when I looked at myself through your eyes that I could see anything good. Otherwise I only saw myself as a starving, annoying brat whom everyone hated, and I hated myself for being that way. I wanted to

⁵⁴ Hayward and Taylor, p. 27.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*; Kimper.

⁵⁶ Hayward and Taylor, p. 31.

tear out my stomach for being so hungry.⁵⁷

Kent: That innate and undying portion of us will often appear to the outside observer to be self-destructive. Such a conclusion is understandable because often it does seem to lead to the destruction of the personality. And yet, all forms of "self-destructive" behavior have at their origin a demand for affirmation. At the core of what we call evil is always a wound that awaits healing.

That which appears to be self-destructive is a part of us that has at some point in our history experienced the pain of being unloved (under specific and dramatic circumstances that are soon hidden from our conscious recollection) refusing to be subjected to such intensity of pain and rejection again.

Joan: Some people go through life with vomit on their lips. You can feel their terrible hunger, but they defy you to feed them.⁵⁸

Kent: Our response is often to disintegrate. We split into many parts: some actively seeking affirmation; others protecting themselves from future experiences that promise to be like the past.

Joan: It's hellish misery to see the breast being offered gladly with love, but to know that getting close to it will make you hate it as you hated your mother's. It's hell to want the milk so much but to be torn by guilt for hating the breast at

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵⁸Hayward and Taylor, p. 28.

the same time. Consequently, the schizophrenic has to try to do all three things at once. He's trying to get the breast, but he's also trying to die. A third part of him is trying not to die.⁵⁹

Kent: Healing is the process of re-integration. It is an opportunity to allow these differing "subpersonalities" within us the chance to voice their needs and fears to one another. This is no simple process. It demands involvement on the part of the "therapist" as well as the "patient." It also demands an atmosphere of love.

Frank: In counseling, a skilled therapist OFFERS another human being the love he needs, and rightfully demands.⁶⁰

Kent: And yet, it becomes important to recognize how limited we are in our capacity to offer love. There is always a real danger in assuming that we are offering love. I fear that all too often we pride ourselves to be something that we are not. Professionals who claim love as a central quality in their approach always run the risk of becoming walled in by their patterns of "loving." It is here that we must await grace . . . the appearance of love in our midst. Often this comes via the so-called "patient." Ultimately, love always emerges through encounter within relationship. It is never brought pre-packaged to the relationship by one of its members.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*; Kimper.

Joan: I had to force you to see that you felt angry and frightened more often than you admitted. When you hid your feelings under the appearance of loving and caring, it made you seem dead. I was terrified. It wasn't the real you at all. It was a mask. The first time I cried, you made a terrible mistake: you wiped away my tears with a handkerchief. You had no idea how I wanted to feel those tears roll down my face. At last I had some feelings that were on the outside. If only you had licked my tears with your tongue, I would have been completely happy. Then you would have shared my feelings.⁶¹

Kent: Joan, you have taught us that we are all such bumbling beginners when it comes to licking tears.

Joan: When my parents loved me they never saw the real me.⁶²

Kent: Tender child, your exile thirst overwhelms me.

Joan: You wanted to feed me, so you wanted me to live. Mother is dry, like a desert. She loves the desert. She never nursed me. With you it was the first time I ever sucked a breast.⁶³

Kent: What one among you when your child asks for milk would give her sand?

What one among you as your child has asked for milk have not given her sand?

Joan: They could only see and love what they wanted me to be.

⁶¹Hayward and Taylor, p. 33.

⁶²*Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 31.

Kent: Teach us, precious Joan, to vomit all that is not oasis.

Joan: They could only love me by destroying the real me.

Kent: They were blind. They (Harry S. Truman) did not know
(Hiroshima) what (oh, Pharaoh) they did.

Joan: Father wanted so much to be nice.

Kent: In the wilderness as well, he too had never visited his
homeland.

Joan: He tried so hard it made me want to cry.

Kent: Then let today be the day of your tears. This moment pro-
claim release to your captives.

Joan: Nobody seemed to understand me. I thought I was just a
hopeless mess, but somehow you made me feel that you could
see . . .

Kent: The promised land . . .

Joan: and love the real me.⁶⁴

Kent: Is not the recognition of and transformation toward the
"real me" the underlying theme of Christianity?

Tillich: Christianity is what it is through the affirmation that
Jesus of Nazareth, who has been called "the Christ," is
actually the Christ, namely, he who brings the new state of
things, the New Being.⁶⁵

Joan: They couldn't see that I was longing for new parents and
a new life.⁶⁶

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁶⁵Tillich, II, p. 97.

⁶⁶Hayward and Taylor, p. 29.

Tillich: The New Being has power to transform . . .⁶⁷

Joan: You have no idea how the warmth of your body would bring me back from my crazy world. It would change my whole picture of life when you held me. I had been so sure that no one could ever give warmth to me. You made everything look different.⁶⁸

The central affirmation of Christianity is that the God of love made an irrefutable statement of that love within the life and death involvement of his son Jesus the Christ. The central issue for our purposes of understanding is a God who chose through love to enter, identify and suffer with the human condition.

Joan: You opened the doors for me to grow that day when you admitted that you had doubts and uncertainties about me. It was such a tremendous relief when you didn't have to be God any more.

As long as you were safe, high above my sufferings, I could only rage at you. When you comforted and reassured me, you seemed a thousand miles away, in a different world. As though I were in hell and you reached down and patted the top of my head. Your fear of coming down with me made me feel more dreadful and hopeless.⁶⁹

Tillich: Those who . . . call him the Christ must assert⁷⁰ . . . that he who is supposed to overcome existential estrangement

⁶⁷Tillich, II, p. 97.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, II, p. 114.

⁶⁹Hayward and Taylor, pp. 32-33. ⁷⁰Tillich, II, p. 114.

must participate in it and its self-destructive consequences.⁷¹

Joan: As soon as you openly showed weakness and uncertainty, my rage could turn to sympathy. I could feel with you. If you were God on a throne, I didn't think you could go down with me and feel what I felt. For me to go down alone into my problems just made us further apart and made me desperate. I had to know you could go down with me into the suffering and the mess, to help me come up again, not just sit by and watch and pity me.⁷²

The "Son of God" becomes one of us so that we might recognize the unity rather than the estrangement we have with the "Father"--a Father deeply involved in "the suffering and the mess." In the Christian life it is the call to continue the identification with the unending suffering that brings new life or what Tillich calls "New Being," to both those who serve and those who are served.

Tillich: "Son of God" becomes the title of the one in who the essential unity of God and man has appeared under the conditions of existence. Everyone who participates in the New Being actualized in him receives the power of becoming a child of God himself. The son re-establishes the child character of every man in relation to God, a character which is essentially human. Being the Son of God means representing the essential unity between God and man under the conditions of existence and re-establishing this unity in all those who participate in

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 97.

⁷² Hayward and Taylor, pp. 32-33.

his being.⁷³

Joan: I could change only when I was sure that you would let me feel like your child and that you would care for me lovingly. If you could like the real me, then I could, too. I could allow myself to be me⁷⁴ . . . I could only believe that I was lovable because you loved me in spite of everything.⁷⁵

Without the external trappings of the Christian tradition, Joan has gone to the center of the Christian experience. Finally, she comes to the heart of Christianity: "I could allow myself to be me . . . I could only believe that I was lovable because you loved me in spite of everything."

Joan: You seemed to be just the kind of doctor I needed . . .

You showed that you felt it was a problem that had to be cleared up. You knew I was terrified, but I knew you would go down to the depths with me. All my other doctors sat on the edge and fished. They waited for me to say things. That's not fair. You went right ahead. You were willing to get in with me.⁷⁶

How many precious Joans are there in this world who must depend upon "All my other doctors . . ."? Be an oasis of healing. This is my only message. This is my only concern. Healing is love made practical. This is my only message. This is my only concern. Love is Christ made visible. This is my only message. This is my

⁷³Tillich, II, p. 110.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁷⁴Hayward and Taylor, p. 34.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, p. 27.

only concern.

SCENE III

A crippled beggar on the
streets of Calcutta.
Dirt-filth for hair,
Air for no arms,
Distance for eyes,
A penny for your thoughts.

A young woman named
Joan (two years ago).
Staring at the walls of
the Rosemead Psychiatric
Hospital.
Twenty minutes later convulsing
on a table with electric shock.

A feeling of passionate
mercy. The rest doesn't
matter a damn.⁷⁷
--Kenneth Patchen

For the moment I know this,
there are sick people and they
need curing.⁷⁸
--Albert Camus

⁷⁷Patchen, no page.

⁷⁸Camus, p. 120.

DEATHBED/EMBRACE

In this final scene I propose to provide the two remaining models for ministry on a death scene. Both are attempts to deal with the problems confronted when those being alleviated from suffering are increasingly outnumbered by those who will suffer. Both are attempts to respond to human need under inhuman conditions.

The first model is presented by Albert Camus, again, in his book *The Plague*. This book is the story of the struggle of our now famous Oran, the city in North Africa with a population of approximately 200,000 persons. It is, more specifically, the story of one man, Dr. Rieux, who is forced to confront the agony of being one of only several doctors as over half of the people of the city die of the plague. His pain intensifies, as do his feelings concerning a silent God, the death of those he loves most and his absolute regard for human life. This regard is the only thing that brings him meaning in a meaningless existence.

I will allow Camus (at times as narrator, at times as Dr. Rieux, at times as other characters in the story), Paul Tillich and myself to dialogue in a manner similar to the previous section.

Narrator: The essential thing was to save the greatest possible number of persons from dying and being doomed to unending separation. And to do this there was only one resource: to fight the plague.⁷⁹

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, p. 126.

The central resource Dr. Rieux has is his undying identification with human life; it is his only resource. Life is to be lived with intensity; its sole purpose is to rage against the inevitable coming of death. Hidden, however, in all of Camus' struggle in life is the tragedy of separation. In life one has the opportunity for meeting, even though, this of necessity, includes the unavailability of eventual separation.

The unavailability of separation and suffering bring Camus's character to a choice to enter fully into every aspect of life. Courage, not for the hope of eventual escape, but rather because there is no escape. Courage, because the only alternative to the understandable option of suicide is total involvement.

Narrator: All the same, following the dictates of his heart, he has deliberately taken the victims' side and tried to share with his fellow citizens the only certitudes they had in common--love, exile, and suffering. Thus he can truly say there was not one of their anxieties in which he did not share, no predicament of theirs that was not his.⁸⁰

Tillich: Man must participate in the human predicament, not only actually--as he always does--but also by conscious identification. He must participate in man's finitude, which is also his own, and in its anxiety. . . . He must participate in man's estrangement which is also his own . . . In formulating the answer, he must struggle for it.⁸¹

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 280, 281.

⁸¹Tillich, II, p. 15.

The struggle, for Rieux, was one of unending agony. His was a constant renewal of the awareness that there was no improvement in sight. And yet, he keeps on.

Narrator: Lifting the coverlet and chemise, he gazed in silence at the red blotches on the girl's thighs and stomach, the swollen ganglia. After one glance the mother broke into shrill, uncontrollable cries of grief. And every evening mothers wailed thus, with a distraught abstraction, as their eyes fell on those fatal stigmata on limbs and bellies; every evening hands gripped Rieux's arms, there was a rush of useless words, promises, and tears; every evening the nearing tocsin of the ambulance provoked scenes as vain as every form of grief. Rieux had nothing to look forward to but a long sequence of such scenes, renewed again and again.⁸²

Tillich: The vitality that can stand the abyss of meaninglessness is aware of a hidden meaning within the destruction of meaning. Even in the state of despair one has enough being to make despair possible.⁸³

Tarron: "Yes. But your victories will never be lasting; that's all."

Rieux's face darkened.

Rieux: "Yes, I know that. But it's no reason for giving up the

⁸²Camus, p. 85.

⁸³Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), p. 177.

struggle."

Tarron: "No reason, I agree. Only, I now can picture what this plague must mean for you."

Rieux: "Yes. A never ending defeat."⁸⁴

Tillich: He who is in the grip of doubt and meaninglessness cannot liberate himself from this grip; but he asks for an answer which is valid within and not outside the situation of his despair. He asks for the ultimate foundation of . . . the 'courage of despair.' There is only one possible answer, if one does not try to escape the question: namely that the acceptance of despair is in itself faith on the boundary line of the courage to be. In this situation the meaning of life is reduced to despair about the meaning of life. But as long as this despair is an act of life it is positive in its negativity. Even in the despair about meaning being affirms itself through us.⁸⁵

Rieux was most definitely in the grip of meaninglessness and despair. The "courage of despair" seems an adequate label to give his response. Whatever the label, he chose to continue life, both his own and those of as many as he could reach. Life was important to him, even if in attempting to protect it it meant an unending defeat. In Tillich's terms, being did affirm itself through him even in the midst of despair; even if he could not articulate why.

⁸⁴Camus, p. 121.

⁸⁵Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, pp. 175-76.

Rieux: Ah, a man can't cure and know at the same time. So let's cure as quickly as we can. That's the more urgent job.⁸⁶

Since the order of the world is shaped by death, mightn't it be better for God if we refuse to believe in Him and struggle with all our might against death, without raising our eyes toward the heaven where He sits in silence?⁸⁷

Tillich: I have written of the God above the God of theism. It takes seriously the radical doubt experienced by many people. It gives one the courage of self-affirmation even in the extreme state of radical doubt. In such a state the God of both religious and theological language disappears. But something remains, namely, the seriousness of that doubt in which meaning within meaninglessness is affirmed. The source of this affirmation of meaning within meaninglessness, of certitude within doubt, is not the God of traditional theism but the "God above God," the power of being, which works through those who ask for a message in the nothingness of their situation and at the end of their courage to be.⁸⁸

Narrator: For who would dare to assert that eternal happiness can compensate for a single moment's human suffering? He who asserted that would not be a true Christian, a follower of the Master who knew all the pangs of suffering in his body and his soul. No, he would keep faith with that great symbol of

⁸⁶Camus, p. 195.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁸⁸Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, II, p. 12.

all suffering, the tortured body on the Cross; he would stand fast, his back to the wall, and face honestly the terrible problem of a child's agony.⁸⁹

In Tillich's terminology we come from the abyss of non-being into the existence of being. It is the abyss from which we stand out that threatens to reclaim us. This gives rise to anxiety. The "unending separation" that Camus fears so greatly is a statement of this fundamental human anxiety.

Tillich: Non-being drives being out of its seclusion; it forces it to affirm itself dynamically.⁹⁰

Rieux: The sufferings of children were our bread of affliction, but without this bread our souls would die of spiritual hunger.⁹¹

Tillich: Non-being makes God a living God. Without the No he has to overcome in himself and in his creature, the divine Yes to himself would be lifeless. There would be no revelation of the ground of being, there would be no life.⁹²

I would like to conclude Camus's model of the "courage of despair" by using a section of his story that most dynamically portrays the "no" bringing life to the "yes" at the ground of our being. It is

⁸⁹Camus, p. 208.

⁹⁰Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, p. 179.

⁹¹Camus, p. 210.

⁹²Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, pp. 179, 180.

the narration of a scene in the local Catholic Church. Father Paneloux, who is later to die of the plague, is giving the weekly sermon to what is described as an overflowing crowd.

Narrator: But Fr. Paneloux continued, there were other precedents of which he would now remind them. If the chronicles of the Black Death at Marseille were to be trusted, only four of the eighty-one monks in the Mercy Monastery survived the epidemic. And of these four three took to flight. Thus for the chronicler, and it was not his task to tell us more than the bare facts. But when he read that chronicle, Father Paneloux had found his thoughts fixed on that monk who stayed on by himself, despite the death of his seventy-seven companions, and above all, despite the example of his three brothers who had fled. And, bringing down his fist on the edge of the pulpit, Father Paneloux cried in a ringing voice: "My brothers, each one of us must be the one who stays!"⁹³

⁹³Camus, p. 210.

And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth." And Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." At the saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.⁹⁴

--Mark 10:17-22

Make us worthy, Lord, to serve our fellow men throughout the world who live and die in poverty and hunger. Give them, through our hands, this day their daily bread, and by our understanding love, give peace and joy.⁹⁵

--Daily Prayer of the
Co-Workers of Mother
Teresa

SELL ALL/SELL ALL

I am introduced to my poverty of suffering as I meet Lara, Joan and Dr. Rieux. I am introduced to my poverty of Spirit when I

⁹⁴*The Jerusalem Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1966). Mark 10:17-22.

⁹⁵Prayer given to Co-workers of Mother Teresa.

meet Mother Teresa.

If the acceptance of our innate gift of grace must necessarily lead through the confrontation of our estrangement, both Jesus and Mother Teresa provide the methodology: that of embracing our poverty. Emptiness precedes filling. There is before us much to be undone before any doing is to be accomplished. There is more to give away than there is to possess. The Kingdom of God does not begin when we have finally attained the proper combination of knowledge, experience and good works leading to perfection. It begins the moment we are poor and crucified.

I do not claim to be either; yet, before any of us can expect to share the urgent ministry of being deathbed attendants, we will have before us such a task.

Mother Teresa dare not lend herself so easily to our need to create Saints and then be done with their message. She is merely a human who has acted on the simple words of Jesus. She sold everything that she owned, gave to the poor and followed Jesus in the form of the destitute and dying on the streets of India. It becomes all too easy to project our inner call to do likewise on to one such as her, thinking that by lauding her with praise we have accomplished our task as well.

Mother Teresa, if we take her seriously, represents the boldest of current attempts to confront the collective estrangement of this time. It is her willingness to "sell all" and settle-in amidst the fallen and broken lives of Calcutta that introduces us to

the poverty of our lives. Our present abundance is accumulated at the expense of others. The impending confrontation with our inherent poverty will be an opportunity to join their experience with a fallen world.

Mother Teresa becomes a point of summary for this presentation. Her recognition of the needs of those in an environment of seemingly endless death and dying combined with her response of identification, life-in-the-midst and unconditional love bring life to my hope of ministry. Her identity with both her fallen brothers and sisters and her God provide the wholeness necessary for a deathbed ministry. Her faith, simplicity and concern for the infinite needs of each individual are the central ingredients for modeling what is most needed.

To tell her story, the English author, Malcolm Muggeridge, went to India to interview her. The following will be edited excerpts from that interview combined with statements by Paul Tillich and myself.

Mother Teresa: We have picked up over twenty-three thousand people from the streets of Calcutta of which about fifty percent have died.⁹⁶

Muggeridge: She stepped out (*into Calcutta*) with a few rupees in her pocket, made her way to the poorest, wretchedest quarter of the city, found a lodging there, gathered together a few abandoned children--there were plenty to choose from--and

⁹⁶Malcolm Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 91.

began her ministry of love.⁹⁷

Mother Teresa is a nun, rather slightly built, . . . not particularly clever, or particularly gifted in the arts of persuasion. Just with this Christian love shining about her; in her heart and on her lips. Just prepared to follow her Lord, and in accordance with his instructions regard every derelict left to die in the streets as him; to hear in the cry of every abandoned child, the cry of the Bethlehem child; to recognize in every leper's stumps the hands which once touched sightless eyes and made them see . . .⁹⁸

Tillich: For religion is the state of being grasped by the power of being-itself.⁹⁹

Muggeridge: I always thought of Calcutta as one of the dark places of our time, where the huge fortunes made out of jute and other industries only served to pile ever higher the human debris out of which they were made. Thus, to *choose*, as Mother Teresa did, to live in the slums of Calcutta, amidst all the dirt and disease and misery, signified a spirit so indomitable, a faith so intractable, a love so abounding, that I felt abashed.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁹⁹Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, p. 156.

¹⁰⁰Muggeridge, p. 2.

This is true. We are seeing an indomitable spirit, an intractable faith, an abounding love. And the feeling of our inner void in the midst of this is as it should be. But we dare not allow the "Mother Teresa" within each of us to receive an unending projection onto this woman who lives and works in Calcutta. We have before us the task of reclaiming what she has ignited within us (and we have so quickly given away) so that our experience of "abounding love" may begin as well. We can begin from the point of her model of hope and our experience of need.

In the film made in Calcutta, there is a shot of Mother Teresa holding a tiny baby girl in her hands; so minute that her very existence seemed like a miracle. As she holds the tiny child, she says in a voice, and with an expression, of exaltation most wonderful and moving: 'See! There's life in her!'¹⁰¹

Mother Teresa: . . . a Hindu gentleman said: that they and we were doing social work, and the difference between them and us is that they were doing it for something and we were doing it to somebody.¹⁰² Welfare is for a purpose--an admirable and a necessary one--whereas Christian love is for a person.¹⁰³ It is not very often things that they need. What they need much more is what we offer them. In the twenty years of work amongst the people, I have come more and more to realize that it is being unwanted that is the worst disease that any human

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, p. 28.

being can ever experience . . . For all kinds of diseases there are medicines and cures. But for being unwanted, except there are willing hands to serve and there's a loving heart to love, I don't think this terrible disease can ever be cured.¹⁰⁴

Muggeridge: Would you agree that one of the troubles is that twentieth century man always thinks there must be some collective solution? He would say, there is Mother Teresa, she saves so many people, she helps so many people, she saves so many children. But this is just a fleabite; this is nothing; there must be some other way of doing it.¹⁰⁵

Mother Teresa: I do not agree with the big way of doing things. To us what matters is an individual. To get to love the person we must come in close contact with him. If we wait till we get the numbers, then we will be lost in the numbers. And we will never be able to show that love and respect for the person. I believe in person to person; every person is Christ for me, and since there is only one Jesus, that person is the only one person in the world for me at that moment.¹⁰⁶

Muggeridge: But one thing that would strike, I think, anybody looking on is the magnitude of what you're tackling and, apart from your own extraordinary faith and the marvelous faith of your Sisters, the smallness of your resources. Don't you ever feel discouraged? Some people believe that a few loving souls

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

trying to tackle such a thing is absurd. What do you think about all that?¹⁰⁷

Mother Teresa: If the work is looked at just by our own eyes and only from our own way, naturally, we ourselves we can do nothing. But in Christ we can do all things. That's why this work has become possible, because we are convinced that it is he, he who is working with us and through us in the poor and for the poor.¹⁰⁸

Muggeridge: It is perfectly 'true,' of course, that, statistically speaking, what she achieves is little, or even negligible. But then Christianity is not a statistical view of life.¹⁰⁹

Tillich: . . . the courage of confidence is not rooted in confidence about oneself . . . one can become confident about one's existence only after ceasing to base one's confidence on oneself. It is based on God and solely on God, who is experienced in a unique and personal encounter.¹¹⁰

Muggeridge: For Mother Teresa, faith is a personal relationship with God and the incarnate Christ; the Mass, the spiritual food which sustains her, without which, as she told me, she could not get through one single day or hour of the life of dedication she has chosen.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹¹⁰Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, p. 163.

¹¹¹Muggeridge, p. 53.

Tillich: Man in relation to God, cannot do anything without him.

He must receive in order to act. New being precedes new activity. The tree produces the fruits, not the fruits the tree.¹¹²

Having first recognized our poverty, we can cease expending our energy in acts of avoidance. We can begin to seek sustenance from God or what Tillich calls, "the ground of our courage to be." The recognition must be that this sustenance can be gained at a conscious level, as in Mother Teresa's intimate relationship with God through Christ, or at an unconscious level as in the case of Dr. Rieux.

In the act of the courage to be, the power of being is effective in us, whether we recognize it or not. Every act of courage is a manifestation of the ground of being, however questionable the content of the act may be. There are no valid arguments for the 'existence' of God, but there are acts of courage in which we affirm the power of being, whether we know it or not. If we know it, we accept acceptance consciously. If we do not know it, we nevertheless accept it and participate in it. Courage has revealing power, the courage to be is the key to being-itself.¹¹³

The imminent death in our midst will bring an end to the "abundance" that has allowed the illusion of distance between self and estrangement to stand. The need will be for attendants of love who have experienced both the terror of the confrontation with their external/internal poverty and the birth into a Spirit of New Being which follows. The deathbed attendant is thus called to be a midwife

¹¹²Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, II, p. 79.

¹¹³Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, pp. 180, 181.

to new life and new hope.

I have given up on expectations of altering the world from its collision course with incomprehensible disaster. I have not given up on love.

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